THE LABOUR MONTHLY

A MAGAZINE OF INTERNATIONAL LABOUR

Editor: R. PALME DUTT

Volume 8 June, 1926 Number 6

The whole issue is devoted to the

GENERAL STRIKE

and the

MINERS' STRUGGLE

✦✦✦

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Editor : R. PALME DUTT

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NOTES of the MONTH

Forward—A Beginning—Stronger Next Time—Lesson All-Important—The Revolutionary Lesson—How the General Strike Came—The Lesson of Black Friday—Towards Mass Struggle—Leaders Old and New—A. J. Cook—Bourgeois Calculations—Unprepared—Dishonest Leadership—The Future General Strike—Against the Capitalist State—Astbury Judgment—Legal and Illegal—Next Tasks

EVERY prediction, policy and warning of the revolutionaries has been justified by the events of May. The Government's nine months of preparations have led to the inevitable and provoked conflict between the entire organised strength of capitalism and the working class in Britain, which the reformist leadership refused either to foresee or to prepare for, and proved unable to conduct. This conflict has proved the first great mass struggle between the united working class and the ruling class since the days of Chartism, and the opening of a new revolutionary era in Britain. The bourgeoisie believe that by their victory the revolution is henceforth killed in this country. They fail to see that the exact opposite is the case, and that the events of the past month are the greatest mass-revolutionary lesson in British history. In this conflict the forms of democracy have been flung to the winds, and the naked force of the State has been revealed in action against the working class. The unhesitating solidarity, enthusiasm and fighting energy of the workers in response has been the triumphant vindication of the working class, and the guarantee of future victory, and has proved the truth of the revolutionary contention that the masses in Britain are already far in advance, in class-instinct and revolutionary courage, of their backward leaders. That this first stage of the new revolutionary battle of the British workers should have been lost and betrayed by the collapse of the reformist leadership was inevitable. But the lesson will be learned. Even the bitter experience of defeat is an essential part of the learning of the revolutionary task. The crimes, follies and treacheries of the reformist

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leadership are paid for in the blood of the workers. It is a heavy price. But the fight goes on; the miners already have shown the way. The way forward lies, not through weakening or abandonment of the struggle, but through renewed struggle, stronger unity, new leadership, new fighting methods, to pit stronger force against the force of the capitalist class and the State. The battle to-day is centred in the miners' struggle, and in the fight against reprisals on the working class. And from henceforth the whole dominating thought and will of every class-conscious worker is fixed with relentless determination on the supreme aim: Next Time!

THE bourgeoisie are shouting loudly that the revolution is henceforth dead in this country, that it has no future in the English-speaking world, that Parliamentary Government is saved, &c. Their cries would be more convincing if they did not shout so loud. It would not have occurred to the English bourgeoisie of fifty years ago to trumpet across the columns of every newspaper and the headlines of every political speech that they were still alive, and not yet overthrown. Their clamour betrays the measure of their fear; and their very asseverations that it can never occur again reveal their uneasy consciousness that it is only too certain to occur again, in a very much more serious form. The future in Britain depends, not on imaginary questions of national psychology, but on objective conditions. The crisis in Britain makes certain the recurrence of the struggle on a more intense scale. 1926 is not an isolated episode, but a point in an ascending scale. The past fifteen years have witnessed a continuous series of ever-enlarging conflicts between capitalism and the working class in Britain, not only because of the increasing concentration of organisation on each side, and the growth of class-consciousness, but also under the inescapable pressure of the worsening economic situation of capitalist decline in Britain, driving the capitalists to launch ever renewed attacks on the workers' standards, and the workers to awaken to more fundamental issues. All these conditions continue, and in an aggravated form, after the battle more than before. 1926, so far from being the final culminating point, marks the opening out from the old

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limited struggles into a new and broader plane of mass struggle, which can only develop into revolutionary struggle.

THE new feature of 1926 was that for the first time the struggle was directly between the capitalist state and the whole working class. From this to conscious revolutionary struggle is an inevitable next stage. It is because they know this that the bourgeoisie are concentrating all their force on preparing for this future struggle, and are endeavouring to use the moment of victory in order to shackle the working-class movement for the future, introduce new legislation, make the general strike illegal, and in every way by process of law hold off the inevitable future. In obedience to their masters, the Right wing leaders are proclaiming that the general strike can never happen again, and are making " Never Again " the moral of 1926. Certainly the general strike can never happen again in the same form, with the workers' forces shackled and bound by a leadership which did not believe in the struggle, and lulled by the opiate of a tradition of passive economic weapons suitable only to the old condition of the sectional trade union struggle. When the general strike comes again, it will come with new leadership, a clearer aim, more active fighting methods, a hundred times stronger, not merely to show the passive strength of the workers, but to strike a blow at the seat of bourgeois power.

TO drive home the lesson of the events of May is now the supreme task. The whole working-class movement has been thrown into momentary confusion by the capitulation of May 12. On every side the insistent question rises up: Why? The strongest and most united working-class front in the history of this country was broken up and smashed in a day, not by the blows of the bourgeoisie, not by any weakening of the workers, but by a collapse of the leadership at the centre. The principal strike-breakers were, not Baldwin and the O.M.S., but Thomas, MacDonald and the General Council. To many well-intentioned spokesmen of the Left this fact, even while they admit it, is still " unbelievable," " incomprehensible " (Wheatley in *Forward*). This staggering confirmation of every revolutionary

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warning came as a blow in the face of every worker who took part in the strike, driving the whole movement to self-questioning and inquiry. It is the heaviest blow yet dealt to the deep-seated tradition of long-suffering trust in leaders not deserving it, and to that false unity, which is not unity in the struggle, but unity in the sense of the tolerance of notorious treachery at the heart of the movement. That there is something profoundly wrong in the condition of the movement for such a thing to be possible to happen is more widely felt than ever before; and the deeper this question of what is wrong is taken, the better for the future and for the highest interests of the working class. What is important is, that this discussion should not be allowed to waste itself and peter out, between official silence on the one side, and random accusations, indictments, charges of treachery, revelations, "behind-the-scenes" details, &c., on the other, but that the broad revolutionary lesson to which the whole situation points should be clearly drawn out from it, and the practical conclusions for action reached.

IT is not a question of this or that individual leader. There is no need to palliate or minimise the personal failure that took place of those in whom the working class had placed its trust, and with whom the working class will have to settle its accounts. The picture presented by those most directly responsible is too obvious to need underlining. Their every word and act and gesture breathed a spirit of shameful humiliation and impotence; a confusion, distortion and evasion of the issues; a cringing servility and whining to the bourgeoisie; a fear and distrust of the workers; and finally a complete abdication and breakdown before the magnitude of what was involved. Their calling of the general strike without any expectation of having to carry it out, and consequently without any serious preparation beforehand, was an act of irresponsibles; their final blind faith in the obvious Samuel hoax of a "gentleman's agreement," at a time when the bourgeoisie was bringing every weapon into play against the workers, was, on the kindest interpretation, an act of greenhorns unfit to be let out without a nurse—and, on a

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more realistic interpretation, rather worse. But all this personal failure was only the expression of something deeper; and it is this deeper underlying failure, which led to all these results, that is of revolutionary concern. This colossal treachery was not simply the treachery and failure of a handful of individuals; it was the treachery and failure of a whole policy, of a whole type of leadership, of the whole ruling, dominant tradition hitherto in the working-class movement, of the whole Second International. Unless this is recognised and changed, nothing is changed. The task of revolutionary propaganda is to deepen and widen the existing resentment against the particular specific acts and particular individual leaders into a conscious revolutionary understanding of the events that have taken place and a consequent constructive aim of future policy.

THE general strike was the inevitable outcome of the whole previous development of events of the class struggle in Britain. The understanding of this fact is the necessary beginning of any discussion of its occurrence and of the problems to which it has given rise. By common agreement the old sectional trade union struggle had reached a point at which it could develop no further along the existing lines. The concentration of organisation had already made every important industrial struggle a national struggle in each industry, and, therefore, from the beginning of the twentieth century, was more and more involving the direct intervention of the State in every important industrial struggle. For the past twenty years every big industrial struggle has been in fact, more and more visibly, a political struggle. Against the closely interlocked forces of the capitalist class, combined through common bodies and employers' associations, united by interlocking directorates and the growing amalgamation or extension of giant concerns beyond the bounds of any one industry, as well as by the close personal ties of a ruling class, but above all united and organised through the common apparatus and direction of the capitalist state, it was inevitable that the trade unions should find themselves compelled to draw closer together if they were to maintain the struggle.

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WHAT hastened the whole process after the war was that the capitalist decline of Britain rapidly began to affect adversely just those skilled workers and workers in heavy industry who had been once the "aristocracy" of labour, and the backbone of the old reformist trade unionism. This capitalist decline, the economic situation of unemployment and "bad trade," knocked the bottom out of the old bargaining basis of trade unionism. The trade unions in the basic industries, in mining and in engineering, found that there was no basis left to bargain; and that, unless they were prepared to fight for fundamental changes in the organisation of industry and attack capitalist ownership itself, they could not even fight to maintain, let alone improve, the standards of their members. From that moment reformism in the British labour movement was doomed. The daily wage struggle had become in fact a revolutionary struggle and a political struggle. The workers could only advance as a class against the whole capitalist class. The battle for daily needs, which had once been the pillar of Liberalism, was now the driving force to revolution. The stronger organisation and concentration of the capitalists, shown dramatically in such bodies as the Federation of British Industries, and the skilful combined strategy of the wage-offensive of 1921-1924, drove the lesson home. The collapse of Black Friday only emphasised the need, and became the standing example of how not to do it. The collapse of Black Friday, and the years of heavy reverses that followed it, were the first great object lesson in the modern history of the working class in this country. By that experience the workers were convinced that they could only be defeated in sections, and that they must unite their forces in order to conquer.

AT the same time the workers threw themselves into the political struggle. Already the mass agitation against the war on Russia, which had forced into being the Council of Action in 1920, had shown the complete blending of the political and industrial struggle, natural and instinctive to the action of the masses, but fatally detrimental to the fig-leaves of constitutionalism of the leaders, who have since spent their time

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trying to explain it away under formulae of sophistication. The workers came forward in millions to vote under the banner of the Labour Party, which held out the objective of a Labour Government and of Socialism. But here the vicious tradition of reformism, of making a complete separation of the political and industrial worlds, and of keeping the political and industrial struggles in watertight compartments, and endeavouring to confine the political struggle to the narrow limits of the parliamentary and electoral horizon, strangled the advance of the workers to a unification of their struggle against the whole capitalist class. The conception of the political struggle, not as the unification of the whole working class struggle, but as a process of the old parliamentary game, actually claiming to have no class basis and completely divorced from the daily struggle of the workers, could only lead to the MacDonald Labour Government of 1924, which set itself apart from the working class, and in consequence became simply a mouthpiece of capitalist policy. In consequence the workers, finding no help for their needs in a "Labour Government" of this kind, and no solution to the actual attacks of the capitalists, pressed forward once again in the trade union field to find the single leadership they needed. The campaign for trade union unity, for the workers' alliance, for single directing power in the hands of the General Council, were all expressions of this fundamental demand for a single class front and leadership. Thus this demand and campaign, expressed through trade union forms, was in reality already a political demand and campaign. The growth of the Minority Movement, which rapidly comprised one-quarter of the whole trade union movement, was also an expression of this new class principle and aim within the trade union organisations of the working class.

THUS by 1925 already a critical and menacing situation had been reached. The whole economic situation, the whole policy of the capitalist class, the whole development of the working class, was driving straight to mass-conflict between the entire strength of the capitalist class and the working class. All the most active elements in the working class, all the most far-seeing and thinking elements, were aware of this, and

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were straining every nerve to prepare for it. But the entire existing dominant leadership, expressed through the official Labour Party and the majority of the General Council, belonged to the previous period and were soaked in its traditions and ideology, to the period of limited struggle, of the artificial confinement of the working-class struggle to the two limited, permitted compartments of sectional trade unionism and the parliamentary comedy, that is, to the period of submission to capitalism and adaptation to the capitalist state; and in consequence they were not only unable to see, but were fundamentally hostile to, the whole new period of mass struggle that was developing and to the real conditions and needs of the new period.

THE one new force that was thrown into the midst of the official leadership was the election in 1924 of the new miners' secretary by the ballot vote of the million miners, thus bringing a single representative of the mass movement outside into the ranks of the existing official leadership, there to carry on as heroic and desperate a fight for the new needs of mass solidarity as has ever been fought by any working-class leader: with the significant result that this one vital point gained by the mass movement became a decisive factor in the dynamics of the actual struggle and in the prevention of a surrender taking place before even the struggle had begun. The lesson of this experience, and of the whole-hearted response of the masses to a single piece of straight leadership and determined revolutionary struggle, is of very great importance for the future; and points the way forward to the revolutionary conquest of the working-class movement that must take place. But at this time the struggle only threw into relief the dominant character of the existing direction; and although an important Left movement developed in official ranks, this was not yet strong enough or clear enough to counter the Right, in whose hands the real direction lay; and at the Scarborough Congress, the decisive congress before the conflict, while the resolutions—coming, not from the leadership, but from the rank and file under revolutionary guidance—reflected a sweeping mass movement to the Left unprecedented in British

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working-class history, the Right wing was actually strengthened in the General Council.

SENSING this whole developing situation, Baldwin and the bourgeoisie in 1925, after the revelation of Red Friday, determined to throw their whole strength into preparing for the inevitable struggle. Sooner or later this conflict would have to come: and it was better that it should come, even with a little forcing of it on, at a date convenient to the bourgeoisie, when their preparations were ready, and before the impending changes in the character and leadership of the working-class movement had taken place. Therefore, reversing their tactics of the 1921-1924 offensive of defeat in detail, they now pursued a policy of deliberately provoking the widest general conflict in order to inflict the widest general defeat on the working class. They calculated that, while they were making the most elaborate preparations themselves, the reformist leadership would make no attempt to prepare against them, but would to the last trust in the old co-operation, and, even when the conflict had been forced upon them, would sabotage the fight and seek only a way out at any price. In this calculation they proved correct. The nine months of Government preparations met no response from the organised working-class movement. Right up to the last weeks, and even up to the last moment, the official Labour Party leadership, the Independent Labour Party, and the trade union leaders were declaring that they did not consider the struggle was inevitable, that measures of preparation were unnecessary or need not be hurried, that a way out would probably be found, that Baldwin was an honourable man, that the Government would probably continue the subsidy, and so forth.

WHY did the reformist leadership fail to make any serious preparations? Why did they fail to see the obvious approaching conflict? Why did they cling to the last to the belief that the struggle would not take place? Because to have admitted the real facts of what was taking place, the real character of the present period confronting the working class, would have been to admit their own bankruptcy and to

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destroy the whole castle of dreams on which reformist democracy is built. If a struggle of this character is inevitable, then the game of parliamentarism is over, the pretence of a peaceful transition to power of the working class has vanished, there is nothing left in front but the hard struggle of two organised class forces with every weapon, and to prepare for it as ably and effectively as possible. Rather than admit this, they clung to every shred of illusion, and refused to face open facts. This did not make the facts any the less real; it did not lessen the blows on the working class; but it effectively prevented the working class from protecting themselves to meet those blows. Because the reformist leadership had placed parliamentary democracy, constitutional legality and the rest of it above the working class, therefore they could not lead the working class, when the hour of crisis came, but had to sacrifice the working class. This was the real treachery, of which the rest was only the inevitable working out. The real treachery was not any individual accidental breakdown: it was pacifism, legalism, constitutionalism, the acceptance of capitalist democracy, that was the treachery; and 1926 was only the working out of this.

FOR this leadership to call the general strike was a mockery. They had preached against the general strike. They had sworn their eternal opposition to the whole principle of the general strike. They had done everything to prevent any preparations for it, and to disarm the working class for any struggle, both materially and morally. Their calling of the general strike was a surrender to the overwhelming mass pressure on the one side, and the forcing tactics of the Government on the other, which left them no escape despite their "grovelling." It was a dishonest surrender against their own convictions; and the dishonesty is shown by nothing more clearly than by the fact that, the moment it is over and the defeat for which they prepared has taken place, the same leaders come hurrying forward to declare that the general strike is wrong in principle and in practice, and that henceforward the last should have been heard of it. If they had been honest, they would either have handed over the leadership to those who did believe in it, or they would have openly

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come forward and confessed their error, confessed that the struggle was inevitable and that the working class could only save itself by fighting, and have thenceforth thrown their whole energy into winning the fight. They did neither. They called the general strike. They poured out the life-stream of working class sacrifice and enthusiasm. But they did nothing to carry forward the struggle or give a leadership worthy of that sacrifice. Instead, their whole effort was concentrated on limiting, restraining and sabotaging the fight, while in secret they gave themselves over to shady intrigues and negotiations with capitalist politicians, culminating in a settlement of surrender that was based, not merely on the desertion of the miners, but on the desertion of their own men.

WHY did they accept this shameful settlement? Because they were not ready to face the forces of the State. This is the most important lesson of the whole general strike experience. It is not possible to take up the general strike seriously without being prepared to enter into struggle with the whole capitalist forces, that is to say, to enter into a political struggle. From this lesson the Right wing leaders are already hastening to draw the deduction that the general strike must be abandoned, that there is no possibility of mass struggle, that the ballot box is the only method, &c. This deduction amounts to saying that the working class must remain in servitude, that the capitalist class is impregnable, and that the workers can only attempt what the capitalist class will permit them to attempt (which may in consequence be regarded as guaranteed harmless). The lesson for the working class is the opposite. The lesson of the general strike of 1926 is that the general strike is not enough by itself, that the general strike inevitably develops into a struggle with the Government and the whole capitalist state, and that henceforth the working class must be prepared for this. What happened in 1926 was that the workers, as a result of their experience and the compelling force of events, had reached the stage of mass struggle, but were not yet ready nor prepared for all that mass struggle involves, and were still trying to realise their fight through an obsolete apparatus and leadership of a

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limited parliamentary and sectional trade union type, which confronted with the new issues, was wholly unable to face them and could only run away.

THE future struggle will inevitably be a struggle directly against the capitalist state. The myth of the classless state and pure democracy has been smashed by the circumstances of the present struggle. The workers, fighting for bread, have seen ranged against them the whole Government and constitution, law and armed force. And meanwhile their leaders were exhorting them to remain loyal to this Government and constitution, law and armed force. That contradiction cannot continue. The leaders, by exhorting the workers to remain loyal to the Government and constitution, made it impossible for the workers even to fight for bread. The fight for bread compels the fight against the Government and constitution. The experience of the present conflict has shown that the real enemy which the working class will have to fight is not simply an employer or a group of employers, but the Government and the capitalist state. "In Conservative hands," declares one pious Labour commentary, endeavouring to minimise the lesson, "the State is nothing but a strikebreaking organisation." There is no need of the limitation. In MacDonald's hands it would be exactly the same. MacDonald had already sanctioned an emergency powers proclamation even in the short tenure of his Government. The Zinoviev letter shows that the State machine knows how to carry out its work with any minister. The workers have to reckon with the fact that their fight is not simply an economic fight, on however massed a scale, but above all a political fight with the Government for power, and that only so can they win their economic emancipation.

THE Astbury judgment is of fundamental importance for the future. By the Astbury judgment the general strike is declared illegal, *i.e.*, outside the scope of permitted trade unionism. But in what does a general strike differ from an ordinary strike? Simply in that it inevitably raises the issue of class power, and therefore becomes a battle with the Government. That is what the bourgeoisie is aware of, and therefore

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is concerned to proclaim the general strike as illegal and prevent its recurrence by every possible means. But in doing so they are in fact making present-day trade unionism illegal. They do not make trade unionism as such illegal. Sectional trade unionism they are prepared to allow and encourage: it is too useful an organising instrument for them to lose, especially if it can be turned by the new agreements into a tame adjunct of the employers, with its principal task laid down as the stopping of unofficial strikes. So soon, however, as the trade unions endeavour to combine, they rapidly find out that their struggle is not a purely industrial struggle, but that their whole being and activity is carried on under the shadow of the state.

BUT the whole development of modern trade unionism is beyond sectional trade unionism to combined trade unionism and even class unionism. There is no other meaning in the whole institution of the General Council, which must henceforth either abdicate in practice or else be prepared to face what a declaration of illegality means. Thus trade unionism is being brought up more sharply than ever before against the question of law, which is the question of politics and the state. Sectional trade unionism, which can no longer serve the workers, is declared legal by the bourgeoise—that is to say is labelled "approved," "safe," "guaranteed harmless," like the ballot box. But united trade unionism, leading to the general strike, is declared illegal—that is to say, not at all safe to the bourgeoisie. It is as if in a football game the umpire were to inform the players of one team that they are at complete liberty to play, so long as they only play one at a time, but that if they attempt to play as a team, he will introduce a new rule against it. Such an umpire would get short shrift from the players; and the Astbury judgment will receive short shrift from the workers.

THE working class will need to rally their ranks without delay to confront the new situation created by the capitulation of the General Council. The workers have been disorganised from their own side, but they have not been defeated in battle. Even the employers' attack on wages, attempted

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as a wholesale onslaught immediately after the surrender, was defeated on the main field by the resistance of the working class. But the attack on wages will be carried forward in every trade; the attack on trade unionism has already gone far; the disorganisation of the workers' ranks is, they hope, to be made permanent by the shackling new agreements signed. Thus the position is that the fight is still in front; and a rapid recovery by the workers can still shatter the effects of the victory that has been given away to the capitalist class. The miners' stand is itself a lead to the whole working class. When the Trades Union Conference meets on June 25, it is to be hoped that it will not simply spend its time upon the past, but that, having clearly faced the past without sparing, then, in the light of that past, it will turn all thoughts to the present and the future, and to the measures to recover the position and to take up the struggle anew. Nothing of the present defeat should be accepted. The support of the miners' struggle is the first and urgent question. The second is the meeting of the capitalist campaign of repression, non-unionism, victimisation, and wage-attacks. For all this the way forward is, not through accepting defeat and disorganisation, but through stronger unity, stronger alliances, confederations of unions, more power to the General Council (a General Council whose composition must be changed), 100 per cent. trade unionism, and a determined fight against all agreements hindering the freedom of action of the trade unions. The trade unions have reached a stage when there is no way forward save the path of mass struggle, and the path of mass struggle is inevitably the path of revolutionary political struggle. This is the central lesson of the present crisis; and the learning of this lesson, and the practical consequences for action that it entails, is the condition of recovery in the present period.

R. P. D.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE GENERAL STRIKE

By R. PAGE ARNOT

Introduction

THE British General Strike is the biggest single event in British working-class history: so big that it cannot be described. Everybody is stunned by it. The general strike weighs down like an alp upon the brain; and each man and each section of society records only the varying pressures to which they were subjected. It makes a great difference whether society is viewed from above or below. Equally so with the convulsion in society called the general strike.

The governing class, of course, had their point of view, and a singularly united and unequivocal viewpoint it was. But within the Labour Movement there are various views, and naturally so. Clearly, the general strike looks a different thing as viewed by the victimised railwayman who will never again be allowed to return to work on the railways because he urged a foreman to join the workers and was reported by that foreman as guilty of intimidation—this man as he waits six weeks along with his wife and children before he can draw the miserable unemployment pittance; as he mingles with his retrospect on the general strike certain pressing calculations of how much his furniture will fetch in the pawnshop and which of it has got to go next; or as he casts his mind back over the years in which he believed in trade unionism and fought for it, only to contrast these memories with the bitter knowledge that trade unionism has now signed away its rights to protect him any longer—that man will have a different outlook on the general strike; will see it from an entirely different angle from that of the House of Commons smoke-room, where thoroughly comfortable trade union officials still draw their salaries of from £500 to £1,000 a year and mildly bore one another with stories of their anxieties during the nine days that shook the General Council.

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No doubt the views of the victimised trade unionist are to be considered "warped" by his "unfortunate" experience. No doubt such an event as the general strike must be taken as a whole and viewed as a whole. It is true that our conclusion on it must be reached free from any passion of resentment and free, too, from the curious, if causeless, jubilation that filled the editorial columns of the *Daily Herald* in the third week of May. Let us endeavour then in this number of the LABOUR MONTHLY to make such a survey, viewing the general strike as a whole and taking into account both the attitude of the victimised striker in Gateshead and the views of the trade union official in Westminster.

A "General Staff"—Unprepared!

On May 1, 1926, a conference of Trade Union executives, by a vote of 3,653,527 to 49,911, decided to call a general strike at midnight on May 3, in support of the miners' resistance to the employers' attack. It was five and a-half years since the passage of the Emergency Powers Act, nine months after the declared intention of the capitalists to use the whole of the subsidy period in preparation for the social conflict, and some two or three days since the General Council of the Trades Union Congress had formulated the general instructions for a general strike.

During the last week of April there had been some discussion in committees leading to the aforesaid formulation of broad instructions. Apart from this eleventh hour and extremely general anticipatory discussions, there had been no preparation on the workers' side.

Prior to August, 1925, there had been the series of changes which transformed the old Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress into the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. These changes had been urged during the war years by many writers under the name of "The Need for a General Staff." This phrase, the General Staff, was a natural enough, though mistaken, use of military terms transferred to the sphere of class warfare. We spoke of the Army of Labour. It was an easy jump from that to speak of the General Staff of the Army of

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Labour and then (here was the mistake) to think that the leading officials of trade unions, if taken together, would automatically constitute that General Staff. A little more knowledge of military matters or of Marxist thought, or of both, would have saved us all this error.

At its best, the General Council could only be likened to such a Federation of States as joined in the Declaration of Independence to wage the war against England from 1776 onward, but did not become an effective United States for ten years afterwards. That is to say, the General Council was a Federal Body somewhat resembling a Conference of Prime Ministers.

These preliminary considerations are needed because of the vagueness in trade union thought as to the precise meaning of the growth of a General Council or of the slogan "All Power to the General Council." A little thought will show us that ever since the forty hours strike in the spring of 1919, an entirely new epoch in strikes had opened. No measures in the way of concrete preparation for strikes on a large scale had taken place. On the enemy side, as we know, the strike-breaking preparations had begun in the spring of 1919, had received their legal sanctions in the Emergency Powers Act of 1920, and had been carried on with feverish energy and haste in the nine months preceding May, 1926. In sum, the growth of the General Council had made it possible to *declare* an embargo or a general strike—it had not made it possible to *conduct* either an embargo or a general strike. It could declare war. It could not conduct war. There was no machinery wherewith to do it. This, in concrete terms, is what is meant by the statement that the working class and the trades unions were not prepared, whereas the other side was.

To say this is not to decry the importance of the growth of the General Council. It is only to get an exact idea of what that peaceful Council of autonomous Trade Unions meant. It was an enormous advance on the junketing and lobbying Parliamentary Committee. But it was not a body designed to conduct class warfare. Only those, who, realising the inevitability of class warfare and the necessity in that warfare of the victory of the working class, can possibly think, plan and act as a General Staff. As in this country, so also all the European experience of trade

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unions and co-operative societies would appear to show that no committee arising from these movements, but only a scientific revolutionary party, can function as a class war General Staff.

Enemy Preparedness

We are not concerned to prove that the enemy was prepared. Let Mr. Churchill speak for himself. In the House of Commons on December 10, in the middle of his nine months' gestation of civil strife, he said:

> The Government thought, moreover, at that juncture, the end of July, that they saw possibilities of actual trade revival. We did not feel justified in predicting it, but we believed from the evidence submitted to us from many quarters that there were good probabilities of an improvement, of a diminution in unemployment, of an improvement in world prices, in relation to our own, and, in consequence, an appreciable bridging of the minimum wage. We were also impressed with the fact that the country as a whole was not sufficiently informed about the character and immense consequences of such a struggle as that with which it was confronted. It is quite clear that a conflict of this kind, launched in this way, might easily cease to be a mere ordinary industrial dispute about wages and conditions and might assume a character altogether different from such industrial disputes. If that were to ensue, then it is quite clear that such a conflict between the community on the one hand, with the Government at its head, and many of the great trade unions on the other, could only end in one way, namely, by the community, at whatever cost, emerging victorious over an organised section of its citizens, however valuable, important, and even numerous that section was. We considered, therefore, that should such a struggle be found to be inevitable at the very last moment, it was of supreme importance that it should only be undertaken under conditions which would not expose the nation needlessly or wantonly to perils the gravity of which cannot possibly be over-estimated. We therefore decided to postpone the crisis in the hope of averting it, or, if not of averting it, of coping effectually with it when the time came.

Now the point is, that as the end of the subsidy period approached, the technical advisors of the Government were in a position to tell that they were now prepared as never before to meet and defeat a general strike. Let no one under-estimate the effect of such communications. In the analysis of imperialist warfare it is clear that the exact date of the outbreak of war or of refusing to allow war to break out is largely determined to the estimate of the situation and to their degree of preparedness by the responsible military, naval and other technical authorities. So it was in this case; with this slight though significant difference,

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that the preparations were on behalf of one class, and the enemy to be crushed, the other class, inside the British nation.

At the crisis-moments of negotiation the actual negotiators are, despite their personal pacifism or their personal belligerency, actually pushed over the brink or snatched back from it by the admonitions and whisperings of their technical advisors. The voice that whispers, "no matter how things go, don't forget that—if it is war—*at this moment* we *can* smash them." So Sir Eric Geddes stood at Lloyd George's ear in 1919. So now, too, all the feelings of the negotiators were wrought upon until they were fully worked up to the point of forcing their unwilling adversaries of the General Council into a general strike. That is to say, not only were the trade unions not prepared, but at the very last moment the general strike was forced upon them.

May Day Prospects

On the basis of these facts three propositions may confidently be set down.

(1) That the actual prospects from the beginning were:—
   (a) Favourable draw;
   (b) Unfavourable draw.

(2) There was no prospect from the beginning of a victory; because of lack of preparation on the workers' side.

(3) There was no prospect from the beginning of defeat; because of the stubborn resistance of the working class.

These three propositions are, of course, made on the basis of the trial of strength between the two sides being tried out to a conclusion.

From that arises a fourth proposition:—

(4) That the only possibility of a sudden ending to the general strike was by one or other headquarters giving way on grounds unconnected with the progress of the struggle, unconnected with the actual position of the conflicting forces.

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To some these propositions may not be self-evident. On the one hand we have those to whom failure of the O.M.S. presaged an early surrender of the Government—a surrender which, of course, would have taken the shape of negotiations for a resumption of work on similar lines to those suggested in the Archbishop's Manifesto. This was a view quite commonly expressed by trade union officials in the districts; and it was in the districts only that the officials had any possibility to estimate the exact situation.

To others the casualties here and there in the shape of men returning to work in driblets seemed a presage of imminent collapse on the part of the workers as a whole. Both these views are wrong, one wrong in its optimism as the other is wrong in its pessimism. The one wrong in its under-estimation of the enemy's strength, the other wrong in its under-estimation of its own strength.

In another article in this number of the LABOUR MONTHLY, a picture is given of the struggle as it developed on one sector, namely, on the N.E. Coast. This makes it needless to go into detail here, but a reply on general lines to each of these standpoints must be given here.

The viewpoint that the Government's side was likely to collapse any moment, shows a lack of understanding in two ways:—

First, it does not understand how extensive are the resources of any modern capitalist government for the purpose of imposing its will by force on a subject population.

Second, it does not understand that a government only collapses when it is rotten.

The other mistaken standpoint betrays an ignorance of the boundless resources of the working class to resist the attack of the employers operating through the Government. Nor do those pessimists and under-valuators of the working class realise the nature of a general strike, and what sort of struggle it is. It is not a series of coincident and synchronised sectional strikes. This is a head and front of their fallacy; that in the literal sense of the word they do not *know* what a general strike is.

Let us go on to clear up these matters further.

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Under-Estimation of the Enemy's Resources

Those who thought the struggle was coming to an end, because the O.M.S. seemed a failure, did not realise that the struggle was only just beginning. The whole of the army had still to be brought in on the side of the Government. It is no use endeavouring to discount this factor by relying upon rumours of troops refusing to entrain, or calculating on troops refusing to fire. These arguments assume that troops cannot be used for any other purpose than shooting. Now the modern army, though its ultimate purpose is to fire, or be fired at, has various intermediate uses. How far, for example, can disciplined bodies of men be used to restore transport to a normal running condition? To find an answer to this question we must turn to recent history of happenings comparable to this general strike. The most recent and the nearest is the Ruhr Occupation by the French, and the main feature of that occupation was the French attempt to break the Ruhr general strikes. Pre-war general strikes, because of the undeveloped preparedness on either side, afford very few useful parallels. The general strikes of Limerick and Winnipeg after the war are more instructive, but were on too local a scale to provide a true parallel, and the same applies to the forty-hour strike in February, 1919, on the Clyde, and to the corresponding movement in Belfast. The railway strike of 1919 and the miners' lock-out of 1921 were each restricted to a single industry. The Ruhr Occupation and the struggle waged between the bourgeoisie of France and the bourgeoisie of Germany is the only parallel which can give us a measure of the forces involved. It is true there are fundamental differences. In the Ruhr there were capitalists on each side. Again, the French capitalists, rightly or wrongly, felt assured they could rely on the French soldiers to go to any length against the German workers. On the other hand, the German workers continued to be paid strike pay in the shape of Government unemployment benefit for weeks and weeks longer than union treasuries in any country could possibly have managed.

Nevertheless, with all the differences allowed for, the magnitudes of the Ruhr adventure of 1923 and the British general strike of 1926 were at least compatible. When we turn to look at the Ruhr we discover that a general strike, though persisted in with

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the utmost tenacity, *can* be beaten by a Government, which, amongst other measures, is prepared to flood the countryside with troops and to employ them for transport purposes. All this can be done without a gun, without the use of a single high explosive shell, or without a single aeroplane bomb being dropped. The modern army with the experience of the Imperialist War behind it is an exceedingly powerful instrument.

When we turn again from the example of the Ruhr and look to our own country we realise another thing, which is that the general strike was a semi-military conflict from the very beginning. In that light it was certainly regarded by the Government, who were prepared, as we know from their own declarations, to go on with this semi-military strike to the point where it transformed itself into a complete military conflict, that is into naked civil war. In that process, the use of the O.M.S. and the failure or success of the O.M.S. represented a mere preliminary stage. It is true that as far as could be judged the O.M.S. was quite a remarkable failure, unless the view be taken that the function of the O.M.S. was to provide a camouflage whereby to deceive the General Council. If so, it was less than a failure. But as regards what everyone had thought its function would be, namely the maintenance of supplies, it did fail dismally. This weakness in the Government's first line was a serious disadvantage to them, but it would have been a mistake to assume that the Government had only one line of attack or advance.

Was it Revolution?

I have already spoken of the over-estimation of our own strength and the under-estimation of the enemy's as the second form of error. But really a wider and deeper question arises from these wrong estimates, the question of whether or not a revolution was possible or likely. This is a question to be gone into very carefully, because the working class will learn more from the experience of a general strike than from many years of agitation. Undoubtedly, the British general strike presented several of the known features that accompany revolution. How far were these features fundamental? How far were other equally essential features absent?

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Many thought it was a coming revolution, none more so than those who feared it most. The fear of revolution, so widespread amongst the bourgeoisie, makes them see it afar off, which it still is. Many union leaders shared their fears; and with preternaturally sharpened nostrils sniffed the blast of the oncoming revolution, sniffed and trembled. But the workers, so much dreaded both by their masters and their elected servants, were as yet unmoved. They knew little as yet of revolutionary situations. For them it was simply a strike to keep up the miners' wages—and all other wages too.

Now there are three different kinds of revolutionary situation. In recent discussions a distinction was drawn between:—

(1) A revolutionary situation in general.

(2) An immediately revolutionary situation.

(3) An actual revolution.

"A Marxist," so Lenin wrote, "knows perfectly well that a revolution is impossible without a revolutionary situation, and also that not every revolutionary situation leads to revolution."

Within living memory we have not had in Britain an immediately revolutionary situation, still less an actual revolution. But now for the first time we have experienced, in the turmoil of the last few years, the effects of a general revolutionary situation. That there is this general revolutionary situation in Britain need not be argued. Those who would deny that would deny the class struggle or even the ground on which they stand.

Under what conditions does a generally revolutionary situation become immediately revolutionary? And from that become actual revolution? To put it another way, what are the essential features or pre-conditions of revolution? To answer, we must get what help we can from proletarian experience of previous revolutions. The proletariat in the last century has been rich in that experience. Its lessons were summarised and summed up from time to time by such men as Marx and Lenin.

At various times in his writings, the latter set forth the preconditions of revolution. In their most abbreviated form these conditions are:—

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(1) The collapse of capitalism.

(2) A working class with a will to victory.

(3) A revolutionary party to lead the working class.

Were these conditions present in the first fortnight of May? To these questions answer cannot be given as a plain "No." And why? Because the general strike was of such magnitude, and so potent in its effects and ramifications, as itself to produce or ripen tendencies until that time latent or undeveloped; so that as day succeeded into night and night into day during the general strike, there came not merely a transition through time but also a transformation of values. "Nine times the space that measures day and night to mortal men" had potency enough for that.

Let us therefore take our stand in the last days of April and estimate how far the pre-conditions of revolution as hitherto known were to be found in British society.

(1) Was there an impending collapse of the bourgeoisie? The answer is no. Of course, the economic decline was still like a ceaseless river washing away the foundations of British Imperialism. But within that period of general decline there was actually by April a slight upward movement. See the unemployment figures' decrease. The pound (with its foot on the neck of the franc) was still looking the dollar proudly in the face. Moreover, the authority of the bourgeoisie was unimpaired, was, in fact, never stronger. The Colonial revolt of 1919 to 1925 had been crushed. The addled Parliament of Locarno was but a slight tear in the web being woven by British diplomacy. The employers' offensive against the railwaymen had been successfully carried through. Other sections of the working class had been cajoled or cowed. Above all, the authority of the Conservative Government was unchallenged, and in the person of Mr. Baldwin the newspaper Press had created just the kind of bull-dog Christ that exactly suited the requirements of both patriotism and religion.*

* If only the Prime Ministers of the eighteenth century could see Mr. Baldwin! The old Oligarchs would laugh at the postures to which the representative of Finance Oligarchy is put. They would never have considered it necessary for "a Gentleman" to pass himself off as "a typical Englishman."

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Yet beneath all this, beneath this surface tranquillity and triumph, there was a sharpening of the class struggle which boded them ill.

(2) Was there a working class with a will to victory? Yes; there was a working class with a will to victory, a will to stand by their fellow-workers, the miners, and not suffer their wages to be reduced.

But that will to victory had before it a limited objective. It had no horizon beyond bringing aid to the miners and thereby resisting the employers' offensive against themselves. Whatever revolutionary ends might be reached, they were neither stated nor implied in the minds of those who were willing to answer the call.

(3) Was there a revolutionary party pointing the way to the fulfilment of the working-class destiny? The answer is: Such a party did exist, a party young and growing, but still widely separated from many of the working class by the furious campaign carried on against them by the bourgeois Press and no less eagerly by the governing group of the Labour Party. Under these conditions, could it have led the working masses along the road of their destiny? To lead in that sense needs a widespread network of local centres responsive to the lead. Not yet had such a stage been reached in the last days of April; and though the period of the strike was to show the members of that party playing a part manfully in every place and bearing the brunt of the Government prosecutions and imprisonments, though it became clear to many that only in such a party could the working class hope to emancipate themselves; yet we cannot say in the last days of April that this particular pre-condition of revolution was fully ready and mature.

Thus it may be said that within the limits of working-class experience the known pre-requisites of a fully-developed revolutionary situation were not present in April, 1926. Does this mean that we answer the question "Was it revolution?" by a complete and categorical negative? By no means. To bind oneself at the end of April to an idea that a revolutionary situation, in the full sense of the word, was impossible, would have been completely non-Marxist and would have revealed only Marxist pedantry. It is true that for the reasons we have given a revolu-

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tion was extremely unlikely: that the odds were heavily against it happening at this particular spring. So much is scientific calculation. But for anyone to hold up their hand to the advancing working class and say "Not yet! Not yet! my monthly prognostications forbid it! I have set my astrolabe and the conjunction of Mars and Saturn is not arrived. I have cast the horoscope of revolution, and its hour has not yet come"—for any Marxist to say these things is to prove himself not an astronomer scientist of the social skies but a mere astrologer and charlatan, whose pedantry in practice leads him into the same camp as those who were bawling "Constitutionalism" louder than the bourgeoisie.

What Happens in a General Strike?

This brings us to the opposite and much more serious error of those who under-estimate their own forces and over-estimate those of the enemy. It is a more serious error because optimism is cured and tamed by experience; while pessimism, especially at the centre, is like a gnawing canker that may waste everything.

What is the fundamental source of this error? First of all, those who thus under-estimate clearly have no notion or vision of what a general strike must mean. They think, as has been said above, a general strike is no more than a series of coincident and synchronised sectional strikes. But just as any social whole is more than the sum total of its parts, so the forces of the working class revealed in a general strike is infinitely, enormously, more than the separate forces of the various unions all added together.

Take no more than a double component of the general strike in the shape of the miners and road transport workers. A strike of miners is one thing, a strike of road transport workers is another. A strike of the two together is certainly more than the sum of their separate efforts. Look at it this way. A miners' strike is a passive strike, or rather, it has been so in the past. They fold their arms. No O.M.S., no scion of a noble family is going to go down the shaft. The sacred battalions of plus fours under no circumstances are going to hew coal. But the whole army of blacklegs is ready to volunteer as chauffeurs; and picketing, unnecessary in the case of the miners, is vital to the success of a transport strike. Let the

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miners add their powers of picketing to those of the transport workers and the accession of strength to the strikers is very great indeed.

From this one example it is possible to judge how great are the resources of the working class called forth by a *general* strike. All unprepared as the trade unions were, nay, taken aback by the general strike, nevertheless the workers rallied to the support of the miners and began in place after place to build up an organisation. Into the minds of millions of men there began to creep a feeling that since the legally constituted authorities were fighting against them, they must of themselves begin to make arrangements to get things done, to put things through, in a word to *organise*. Things had to be done, and men and women in millions began to think of doing what was needed.

Contrast this with the ordinary strike, national or local. The other trade unionists, through their branches, or by individual contributions, help in one way or another, when the call is made upon them ; and think little more about it until the next call comes. They maintain the trade union principle not to touch " black " work. They may " in sympathy " come out here or there to support their mates. But in the main it is true that they rely on all the ordinary legal institutions carrying on as before ; and on capitalism doing everything for them. It is still their mother, their father and their God. At ordinary times, then, there is little scope for proletarian initiative. Such initiative as is shown by individuals or small sections is carefully canalised into the channels of Local and National capitalist electoral bodies ; is carefully trained in " the art of Government "—even up to the point where a Labour man can be trained to say with bland conviction that the " House of Commons is the best club in London."

How well the bourgeoisie have learned to apply Lord Sherbrooke's bitter maxim, " we must educate our masters ! "

A general strike changes all that. It calls forth working-class initiative into new channels—channels that have not been carefully hollowed out aforetime by the shaping hand of the bourgeoisie. Men, and women too, do things not because their fathers did them or the class above them did them, but because they want or need to do them. An enormous liberation of energy begins—but

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slowly—very slowly. It takes days before the workers begin to put off sleep and arise from slumber. Many of their own elected servants help to keep them chained in the habits of the time before there was a general strike.

Moreover, this first general strike was called not because there was an irresistible molecular movement, a bursting asunder of habits and a craving after immediate action for their fellows and in their own behoof. No. This was a general strike, with a limited horizon, and all action had to take place through the legally constituted bodies of the Trade Unions. Spontaneity did not appear, to begin with, to any large extent. Discipline was more evident. But enough has been said to show that a general strike calls up forces hitherto unsuspected in the working class. Our pessimists have no ground for their grousing and their tremors.

How does this general consideration work out in detail? In this way: after the first few days have passed and as working-class initiative develops, each day that the strike goes on makes the working-class side stronger and stronger. The forces of the bourgeoisie, on the other hand, are strictly limited. They can be reckoned up beforehand with exactitude. They may not be brought into play all at once. But there are no unknown resources. In the working class, on the other hand, each day after the first few days have passed reveals new and unsuspected virtues or abilities. The general movement of the working class is gathering momentum all the time, irrespective of what additional (quantity) mobilisations are taking place or further resources being called forth.

A general strike cannot take place without casualties on both sides. The word "casualties," for the moment, I am using in a very restricted sense. I mean on the side of the Government such failures as partial breakdowns of the O.M.S.; on the workers' side by the return to their job of sections of the men on strike. These casualties are certain. They have to be allowed for; but until they assume the very highest proportion, they have little influence on the total effect of a movement which is actually gathering momentum from day to day. Even if no reserves are called forth, the driblets back are more than nullified.

Can we say when the maximum effect of this gathering momentum will be reached? No, we cannot. But though we

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cannot name the maximum we can, as the result of the experience in the localities, say with the utmost definiteness that on the ninth day of this last general strike the maximum had not yet nearly been attained. Remember it is not a question simply of the amount of men on the field. It is a question of the development to the full stretch of the working-class effort, only gradually released from its thraldom of customary subservience to the capitalist order.

So much for erroneous under-estimates of working-class forces in a general strike.

In the whole of the above section, beginning with the four propositions and followed by the arguments dealing with mistaken estimates of a general strike, two important factors have been left out of account. It was necessary to leave them out in order to have that abstract presentation of the argument through which alone clarity can be attained. For this reason also the propositions and the arguments were presented as they might appear to an observer making his reckonings in the latter part of April, 1926.

The abstraction was made partly by withdrawing from consideration the past record and political outlook of the members of the General Council, to whom, by an overwhelming vote, the Trade Unions of this country had committed the charge of the General Strike. This factor is at any time of great importance. It is allowed for in the fourth proposition on page 341.

The abstraction was also made by the further process of leaving out of account all consideration of force, of questions of what the State and the employers would do in order to break the strike by violence and intimidation. It will be remembered that in drawing the comparisons with the Ruhr Occupation I expressly dealt with the army only as an instrument for the Maintenance of Supplies and not as an instrument by whose bayonets, machine guns, tanks, aeroplane bombs, &c., &c., the will of a Government is imposed on subject population. Now of course this question enters very definitely into any consideration of the general strike. It is one that has to be faced ; if it is not faced then so much the worse for us. But it will be sufficient to discuss this question—which is nothing less than the question, " Can a general strike succeed against the armed forces of the Crown? "—in some future issue of this magazine.

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A WORKERS' COUNCIL OF ACTION

By THE SECRETARY — TRADES COUNCIL

ON the afternoon of Sunday, May 2, 1926, the Trade Union Council sent forth the usual preparatory telegrams to the Unions that would be immediately affected by a general stoppage. Late on Sunday night a representative of the General Council who had been spending the time "trying to find a formula" received an ultimatum, a letter from the Prime Minister forcing the general stoppage. Accordingly on Monday, May 3, the strike telegrams were sent all over the country and the whole of "the first line," comprising amongst others heavy industry, transport, building and printing, were ordered to cease work. Above and beyond this, the only instructions or lines of action, the only orders of the day known to the workers, were comprised in the following meagre set of decisions: —

Trades Union Congress General Council

THE MINING SITUATION

PROPOSALS FOR CO-ORDINATED ACTION OF TRADE UNIONS

[It should be understood that memoranda giving detailed instructions will be issued as required.]

(1) SCOPE

The Trades Union Congress General Council and the Miners' Federation of Great Britain having been unable to obtain a satisfactory settlement of the matters in dispute in the coal-mining industry, and the Government and the mineowners having forced a lock-out, the General Council, in view of the need for co-ordinated action on the part of affiliated unions in defence of the policy laid down by the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, directs as follows :—

TRADES AND UNDERTAKINGS TO CEASE WORK

Except as hereinafter provided, the following trades and undertakings shall cease work as and when required by the General Council :—

Transport, including all affiliated unions connected with Transport, *i.e.*, railways, sea transport, docks, wharves, harbours, canals, road transport, railway repair shops and contractors for railways, and all unions connected with the maintenance of, or equipment, manufacturing, repairs, and groundsmen employed in connection with air transport.

Printing Trades, including the Press.

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PRODUCTIVE INDUSTRIES

(*a*) *Iron and Steel.*

(*b*) *Metal and Heavy Chemicals Group.*—Including all metal workers and other workers who are engaged, or may be engaged, in installing alternative plant to take the place of coal.

Building Trade.—All workers engaged on building, except such as are employed definitely on housing and hospital work, together with all workers engaged in the supply of equipment to the building industry, shall cease work.

Electricity and Gas.—The General Council recommend that the Trade Unions connected with the supply of electricity and gas shall co-operate with the object of ceasing to supply power. The Council request that the Executives of the Trade Unions concerned shall meet at once with a view to formulating a common policy.

Sanitary Services.—The General Council direct that sanitary services be continued.

Health and Food Services.—The General Council recommend that there should be no interference in regard to these, and that the Trade Unions concerned should do everything in their power to organise the distribution of milk and food to the whole of the population.

With regard to hospitals, clinics, convalescent homes, sanatoria, infant welfare centres, maternity homes, nursing homes, schools, the General Council direct that affiliated unions take every opportunity to ensure that food, milk, medical and surgical supplies shall be efficiently provided.

(2) TRADE UNION DISCIPLINE

(*a*) The General Council direct that, in the event of Trade Unionists being called upon to cease work, the Trade Unions concerned shall take steps to keep a daily register to account for every one of their members. It should be made known that any workers called upon to cease work should not leave their own district, and by following another occupation, or the same occupation in another district, blackleg their fellow workers.

(*b*) The General Council recommend that the actual calling out of the workers should be left to the unions, and instructions should only be issued by the accredited representatives of the unions participating in the dispute.

(3) TRADES COUNCILS

The work of the Trades Councils in conjunction with the local officers of the Trade Unions actually participating in the dispute, shall be to assist in carrying out the foregoing provisions, and they shall be charged with the responsibility of organising the Trade Unionists in dispute in the most effective manner for the preservation of peace and order.

(4) INCITEMENT TO DISORDER AND SPIES

A strong warning must be issued to all localities that any person found inciting the workers to attack property, or inciting the workers to riot, must be dealt with immediately. It should be pointed out that our opponents will in all probability employ persons to act as spies and others to use violent language in order to incite the workers to disorder.

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(5) TRADE UNION AGREEMENTS

The General Council further direct that the Executives of the Unions concerned shall definitely declare that in the event of any action being taken and Trade Union agreements being placed in jeopardy, it be definitely agreed that there will be no general resumption of work until those agreements are fully recognised.

(6) PROCEDURE

(*a*) These proposals shall be immediately considered by the Executives of the Trade Unions concerned in the stoppage, who will at once report as to whether they will place their powers in the hands of the General Council and carry out the instructions which the General Council may issue from time to time concerning the necessary action and conduct of the dispute.

(*b*) And, further, that the Executives of all other affiliated unions are asked to report at once as to whether they will place their powers in the hands of the General Council and carry out the instructions of the General Council from time to time, both regarding the conduct of the dispute and financial assistance.

A. PUGH, Chairman.

April 30, 1926. WALTER M. CITRINE, Acting Secretary.

How exactly were these instructions, so broad and general in their lines, to be interpreted to meet the differing circumstances of each particular place and trade? And who was to do the interpreting? And how were the hundred and one things not mentioned in the Circular to be looked after? And by what machinery? And under what authority?

These were the questions suddenly arising before the Trade Unionists of Great Britain during that opening week-end of May.

How they were answered it is not possible to say. Full reports are not yet available. But we can say that in some few places they were content to leave the questions unanswered; at first in a vague feeling that the general strike could not possibly be about to take place; and thereafter in a pathetic expectation of the hourly arrival of detailed instructions from Eccleston Square, instructions that never came. In others, and these the majority, the trade unionists did what they could pending the arrival of instructions. They set up strike machinery, made arrangements for joint working of all trades, and began in one locality after another to do as best they might the preparatory work needed.

It was an attempt to cover the work of months and years in a couple of days.

The best way to get a picture of how and whither the workers

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were moving in the towns and villages of Great Britain during the opening days is to set forth the plans and preparations of one particular locality. It is not perhaps typical of the whole. Others may have been better prepared. Many were certainly less well prepared. But nevertheless, in the first days of May the working class throughout Britain were moving along lines similar to those of this particular locality.

In this locality of ————, the local Trades and Labour Council had called a meeting of all its delegates for the Sunday evening, May 2; and had invited thereto all other sections and representatives of all working-class organisations, including members of Co-operative Boards of Management, officers of the Women's Co-operative Guild, and of the women's section of the Labour Party, representatives of the Communist Party and the Plebs League, Labour Guardians, Labour Councillors and County Councillors.

A plan of campaign was put before the meeting, which after brief discussion accepted the plans and constituted itself a Council of Action.

PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

Preamble.—No time to be spent to-night on discussion of *purpose* of strike (to aid the miners) or origin or possible ending or national aspect or international aspect. Not concerned for next few days with any wider horizons : concerned only with concentrating on our limited objective.

Objective.—To defeat the Civil Commissioner appointed for ———— Region. The Civil Commissioner is appointed by the Government and is armed with the Emergency Powers Act in order to break the strike. Our immediate aim is to prevent him doing that in this town. But in order to do that effectually we must offer a resistance throughout the whole region over which he has been given plenary powers. That is, we must defeat the Civil Commissioner and all his strike-breaking apparatus.

The E.P.A. Apparatus.—The apparatus of a regional Civil Commission comprises :—

(1) The arrangements and organisation built up by the Ministry of Health during the last nine months.

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(2) The arrangements and special organisation prepared by theHome Office.
(3) The plans and arrangements devised by the War Office, Admiralty and Air Force.
(4) Sundry other arrangements and organisations provided or prepared by Government Departments and placed under his jurisdiction.

That is to say, there will be concentrated against the strikers in the ———— Region the whole of the Civil and Military institutions that are under central control; and also the civil institutions usually classed as Local Government.

With regard to the last of these it remains to be seen whether he would be able to make the full use of them that he would wish.

The Strike-Breakers' Man-Power.—The actual bodies of men at the disposal of the Civil Commissioner are :—

(1) Local and national Government Officials.
(2) The Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies.
(3) Various other strike-breaking bodies, composed mainly of middle-class persons.
(4) The Fascisti, one of whose organisations had entered into an arrangement with the O.M.S.
(5) The Special Constabulary, in which it was likely many of the Fascisti would enrol.
(6) The Special Civil Constabulary, a body of armed men with steel helmets organised solely for the purpose of coping with the strike.
(7) The regular County and Borough Police Forces.
(8) The Army, the Navy and the Air Force, equipped with tanks, machine guns, submarines, torpedo boat and aeroplanes.

Working-Class Machinery.—To meet all this we must improvise. The improvised machinery must be simple, easy to throw up, all inclusive. All activities in each locality should be centralised in a single body to be called Council of Action, Strike Committee, Trades Council or what you will : all such bodies should be linked up and centralised in the county capital town under a body responsible for the whole region.

Councils of Action.—The first task: To-night's meeting should set up a Council of Action and plan out all the machinery and all the tasks for the locality.

The second task is to set up replicas of this Council of Action in every corresponding locality throughout the various counties, so as to make a network of Council of Actions linked up with a

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central directing body whose authority and scope on our side would exactly answer to the Civil Commissioner.

The Regional Authority.—The third task is to assemble the district officers of Trade Unions, men who by experience and routine are capable of thinking in terms of the counties as a single whole. In certain unions there will not exist any such divisional officers or regional committee. In such case recourse must be had to other units of the organisation until such time as formal arrangements can be entered into and a formal constitution drawn up. Meantime an assembling of district or divisional officers will in itself constitute a body of sufficient experience and make sufficient pooling of authority to do the work effectively.

Special Newspaper.—Task No. 1 can be solved to-night. The other two tasks, the building of district authority and a network of local bodies must be solved mainly by the printing and scattering broadcast of a special strike newspaper.

Strike Bulletin.—This strike bulletin should appear each day during the strike, but it will have two purposes ; it will have one purpose up to the moment the general strike is declared and another purpose thereafter. Its purpose up to the moment of the declaring of the general strike is precisely this—to organise the whole of our counties in Councils of Action and to link up the organisation in a regional authority. It is impossible to send speakers all over the counties or to do anything else than to print this bulletin and spread it by despatch riders. In this way only can the necessary machinery be rapidly improvised.

Tasks of Councils of Action.—The Council of Action will have a number of tasks for which Sub-Committees should be set up. These will include :—

Communications (Despatch Riders, &c.)
Feeding Centres.
Food and Transport.
Co-operative Societies.
Local Government.
Sports (to serve a double purpose).
Defence Corps.
Picketing.

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Permits.
Organisation of Women.
Publicity : (*a*) Local Stencils, (*b*) Other publicity.
Information.

Local Government.—The Urban District Councils, &c., are not necessarily to be handed over to the Civil Commission in their entirety. A struggle may take place for the possession of the machinery of such authority as is possessed by Boards of Guardians or Urban District Councils. It may be possible to impede the operations of the Civil Commissioner and his officers under the E.P.A. ; perhaps even to transform part at any rate of the Urban District Council into strike machinery.

Food and Transport.—The T.U.C. instructions for the general strike, if and when it should come off, include the provision of Food Transport and Health Services. Whatever the intention of the General Council in laying down this instruction, it is clear that on this point depends the success of the general strike. Whoever handles and transports food, that same person controls food : whoever controls food will find the " neutral " part of the population rallying to their side. Who feeds the people wins the strike ! The problem of the general strike can be focussed down to one thing—the struggle for food control.

Morale.—All these activities and all this machinery needed for these activities are designed for the purpose of defeating the Civil Commissioner's attempt to break the general strike. But they have another object. That is the building up of our own morale both locally and nationally, and the breaking down of the enemy's morale both locally and nationally. Every officer who reports that picketing has stopped his transport, every military officer who reports that he cannot trust his men to act against the strikers because of effective fraternisation, is a means by which when the report has filtered through to Whitehall the morale of the Chief Civil Commissioner, and thence of the Cabinet, is impaired and weakened.

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ONE SECTOR

An Account of the Proceedings of the Northumberland and Durham General Council and Joint Strike Committee

[*We give below the text, complete except for a few unimportant omissions, of this official report, presented to and accepted by the Northumberland and Durham General Council on May* 20.]

AS a result of an informal meeting on Monday evening, May 3, 1926, at the offices of the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers, Newcastle-on-Tyne, the possibility of setting up some co-ordinating Committee for the conduct of the general strike in the Durham and Northumberland area (the area of the Civil Commissioner), was discussed, and it was agreed to summon a meeting of representatives of other Unions for the next day (Tuesday, May 4).

On the Tuesday afternoon a meeting of the various Trade Union representatives was held in the offices of the N.U.D.A.W., 47 Leazes Terrace, Newcastle, at 2.30 p.m. It was agreed that Mr. James White, Area Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, be elected to the Chair, and Mr. Charles R. Flynn, Northern Divisional Officer, N.U.D.A.W., be elected Secretary.

At this initial meeting the following Unions were represented :—

Northumberland Miners' Association
Northumberland Colliery Mechanics' Association
National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers
Transport and General Workers' Union
National Union of Sailors and Firemen
Shop Assistants Union
National Union of General and Municipal Workers
Boilermakers' Union
Federation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades
Railway Clerks' Association
National Union of Railwaymen
Builders' Federation

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together with the :—

Gateshead Labour Party and Trades Council
Newcastle Trades Council.

Mr. Will Lawther (a member of the Durham County Miners' Federation Board, and also Executive member of the National Labour Party) unofficially represented the Durham Miners' Association. Mr. R. Page Arnot (Director of the Labour Research Dept.) was also present.

The Chairman, Mr. James White, outlined the purpose of the meeting, and the organisation that it was proposed to form ; he stressed the need for co-ordination of the various activities that would have to be undertaken under the directions of the General Council and the instructions of the Executives of the National Trade Unions.

After a statement had been given of the position of each Union in relation to the general strike, which had then been in process for some fifteen hours, it was agreed, on the motion of Flynn, seconded by Ebby Edwards, to form a local General Council to cover the Northumberland and Durham area, with two representatives from each Trade Union.

It was agreed in addition to appoint a Strike Committee composed of one representative from each Trade Union, or Group of Trade Unions, on Strike or locked out.

Sub-Committees were suggested both for the General Council and the Joint Strike Committee as follows :—

General Council Sub-Committees : Publishing, Propaganda, Demonstration and Entertainment, Ways and Means, &c., &c.

Joint Strike Committee Sub-Committees: Transport Problems, Permits, Food Supplies, Picketing.

The General Council and the Joint Strike Committee were given power of co-option and Mr. R. Page Arnot was co-opted on to both.

The first meeting of the Joint Strike Committee was decided for that evening at 7 o'clock, and it was settled that the General Council should meet daily at the Burt Hall, Northumberland Road, Newcastle, at 3 p.m.

The meeting terminated with the first hint of the difficulties of

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a general strike in the shape of a complaint that miners' clubs faced with a drink shortage were sending in motors for beer whilst transport workers were out on strike.

FIRST MEETING OF STRIKE COMMITTEE

(Tuesday, May 4, 1926)

THE Joint Strike Committee met on the Tuesday evening. Nearly everybody present had a set of telegraphic instructions issued from the various Trade Union head offices which had to be co-ordinated with the sometimes conflicting instructions from other head offices. So far was it from being a question of putting previously prepared plans into action that the Committee were forced to spend the evening in problems of simple co-ordination. In short, by that Tuesday evening the improvised machinery had not yet begun to function as far as the conduct of the general strike was concerned.

Another instance of this was the question of Sub-Committees. The meeting on the Tuesday afternoon had agreed to various Sub-Committees being set up by the Strike Committee. But Sub-Committees must necessarily proceed from a body whose own movements have attained some degree of simple co-ordination, whose members know one another, and whose machinery has been tried and tested. The Strike Committee was not in this position! It could not set up Sub-Committees on points where so far it was not yet known whether the various Unions might not turn out to have conflicting regulations or policies. Under such circumstances Sub-Committees would simply have resulted in doubling the discussion on each problem, with an added amount of friction in each case. Accordingly the Strike Committee decided to set up no Sub-Committees but to deal with each question itself. This meant, of course, an enormous accumulation of work. It meant that within a few days the Committee began to sit in the morning, and to continue from morning to afternoon, evening and midnight. It resulted further in the concentration of all activities in the hands of the Strike Committee (*e.g.*, all permits were latterly centralised in the hands of the Joint Strike Committee and issued only under the signatures of its Chairman and Secretary), who thus learned to handle each problem, to know one another

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by participating in common discussion and decisions, and finally to get the measure of what was important and what was relatively unimportant.

By the end of the first five days a stage had been reached where the Committee could confidently begin the process of decentralisation and a measure of this was already in operation when the strike was called off.

An example of the need for simple co-ordination in interpreting the General Council and Union Executive instructions was the following instance :—One Transport Union on the first day of the general strike had called out all men concerned with the transport of food but had given permits for the transport of building materials ; another Transport Union had rigidly stopped all transport of building material but was continuing to give a certain number of permits for the transport of food. Similar problems to this necessarily took a good deal of time to clear away.

In the same evening the Joint Strike Committee considered a Strike Bulletin which had been issued by the Spen and District Trades and Labour Council that morning, and printed by Thomas Summerbell of Sunderland. This strike sheet of four pages was very effectively printed and its tone was very calm and moderate. In view of the effect of the blackleg sheets which were appearing, it was decided that the Joint Strike Committee should take over this Strike Bulletin and issue a publication as soon as a permit from the Typographical Association could be granted. This question of printing permits was to be one of the main difficulties of the Joint Strike Committee.

The same evening a number of points as to Food Permits were raised with the General Council of the T.U.C., whose Acting Secretary (Mr. W. Citrine) was asked to remain in touch with the Joint Strike Committee directly as well as through the medium of the various Trade Union headquarters.

THE SECOND DAY—LABOUR WITHDRAWAL AND PERMITS

THINGS were a little cleared on the second day ; reports of the situation were given by the various Unions for areas varying from regions such as the whole of the North

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of England to purely local reports. For the first time it became possible to appreciate the situation. It became clear that the stoppage had not been fully effective as ordered on Monday midnight ; and that the operation of the general strike had only been getting under weigh in the course of the Tuesday. For example : some obstruction had prevented the printers at Sunderland from coming out till Wednesday ; a scratch meeting of the Railway Clerks' Association for one locality had resulted in a vote against coming out on strike, a vote which was subsequently to be overwhelmingly reversed at a later meeting. Again there was still a considerable amount of transport at work caused by the various Unions' interpretations of the General Council's decision to continue to supply Food, Health and Sanitary services. All these hitches and delays were perhaps inevitable ; they were clearly incidental to the fact that on the Trade Union side no preparations had been made in advance for carrying out the general stoppage.

With regard to the constitution of the Committee matters were also further advanced; Unions whose representatives had been prevented from coming on the Tuesday were present on the Wednesday. The only Union not officially represented at this stage was the Durham Miners' Association.

In the morning of Wednesday Mr. Page Arnot travelled to Durham and saw Mr. James Robson, whom he informed of the formation of the Northumberland and Durham General Council and its desire that the Durham Miners should be represented upon it as soon as possible. Mr. Robson, in replying, stated that he would bring the matter up before his colleagues but that it would require a Board Meeting to make the necessary appointment. Meantime the Committee availed itself of the advice of Mr. Will Lawther, whom they co-opted on to both bodies pending the official appointment.

Another unofficial representative welcomed was Mr. James Rogers, the Regional Organiser for the North-East Coast of the Sailors and Firemen's Union. This Union as well as another had decided to take a ballot. But its officials in this region, and, as we afterwards found, in almost every area, had decided to obey the

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orders of the Trade Union Congress General Council. In the special circumstances of this Union it was decided to accept Mr. Rogers on the Joint Strike Committee.

At the afternoon meeting of the General Council the representative of the Electrical Trades Union reported the decision of the Union to stop commercial and industrial power. It was stated that in order to obtain uniformity of action the representatives of the Workers' Side of the Joint Industrial Council for the Electricity Supply would place themselves in the hands of the Northumberland and Durham General Council. Accordingly it was decided to instruct those representatives that all power supplies of electricity should be cut off from Industrial concerns except where permits were granted by the Strike Committee.

At the evening meeting of the Joint Strike Committee a report was given on further negotiations that had taken place with the Newcastle Electric Supply, and that on the representation of the Manager it had been decided to postpone action till after meeting at 11 o'clock on the next morning (Thursday, May 6). The plea had been put forward by the Manager that it was necessary to make certain technical arrangements with regard to the supply of power to industrial concerns as distinct from the supply through the general network. This delay, it turned out afterwards, was a pretext. Every possible sort of arrangement had already been made for carrying on the Lighting and Power Supply with blackleg labour. The adjournment proposed by the Manager was merely a device to gain nearly 24 hours more time. The Workers' Side of the J.I.C. for the Electricity Supply Industry was eventually withdrawn on the Thursday afternoon.

Three main problems can be selected from the multitude of problems that crowded upon the Committee on the Wednesday evening. These are :—

(*a*) The question of permits in general ;

(*b*) The question of Printing Permits for the Joint Strike Committee itself ;

(*c*) The negotiations initiated by Sir Kingsley Wood.

It has already been shown that a certain amount of incoordination in the issue of permits had already occurred due to the

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General Council's instructions-in-chief published on the Saturday. As applications for permits began to pour into each separate union's District Office, to each local body (Council of Action, Trades Council, Local Transport Sub-Committees, &c.,) the position became more and more complicated. Beyond these complications, however, a much more serious aspect was the abuse of permits which was beginning to reach gigantic proportions in the course of Wednesday afternoon. Unscrupulous contractors or employers were conveying any and every sort of goods under the ægis of " Food Only " or " Housing Materials Only." On the Wednesday evening, therefore, it was decided on the reports received from the Transport Unions that all permits for transport of building materials should be withdrawn and no new ones issued. At the same time the Strike Committee expressed its opinion (for transmission to the General Council) that the exception to the general strike order in favour of Housing should now be withdrawn. The effect on the mind of the workers out on strike of any transport was found to be bad ; the mere rumble of wheels was something that weakened the morale of our men and correspondingly cheered the other side. The attitude of the Joint Strike Committee in this matter was presently confirmed by a wire from Mr. Bevin urging the closest supervision over the issue of permits in view of the abuse that was being made of them. It should be noted at this point that the local Transport Sub-Committee had handed over its powers to and was itself incorporated with the Joint Strike Committee.

The Committee again considered the question of printing permits for the sole purpose of getting power to print such general strike literature, including the *Strike Bulletin*, as would be an effective counterpoise to the flood of propaganda and false news being poured into the improvised blackleg papers of the other side. So far the *British Gazette* had not appeared ; it was not until a week later that the *British Worker* was to make its first appearance in its Newcastle edition. It was on this question of the need for clearly supplying all the information that the Committee felt its position to be weakest in the Northumberland and Durham region.

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SIR KINGSLEY WOOD APPROACHES THE COMMITTEE

IN the evening Mr. Tarbit, of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, informed the Committee that the O.M.S. had been brought on to the Newcastle Quayside for the discharge of Foodships ; whereupon the Trade Union labour already employed there under permit abandoned their work, because of the O.M.S. and because of the presence of two destroyers and a submarine moored alongside the Foodship in the river. Later in the evening the Committee were informed that Sir Kingsley Wood desired to see Mr. Tarbit, and by a later 'phone message that he desired also to see other members of the Strike Committee. Sir Kingsley Wood then visited the Burt Hall (the offices of the Northumberland Miners' Association), where the Strike Committee were in session. He interviewed Messrs. Tarbit, White and Flynn. After a lengthy conversation it was agreed that the conversation should be adjourned till the next day at 12.30 p.m. (Thursday, May 6), in order to enable Sir Kingsley Wood to consult his officers and to bring with him General Sir Kerr Montgomery and Mr. Moon, the former previously head of the O.M.S. for the region and now working directly under the Government, the latter being Food Controller. The Joint Strike Committee agreed to this arrangement. The conversation of Thursday began at 12.30 and lasted till 3 p.m.

As these interviews of Sir Kingsley Wood and his officers with the representatives of the Joint Strike Committee have received a certain amount of publicity, and since it has been officially denied in the House of Commons that any such negotiations took place, it may be well to give in some detail the substance of the negotiations as reported to the Joint Strike Committee immediately after each conversation had taken place. We quote from the Minutes of the Joint Strike Committee :—

Extract from Minutes of the Joint Strike Committee, Wednesday, May 5, 1926

(9) At this juncture White, Flynn and Tarbit left to interview Kingsley Wood in Edwards' office.

(10) Subsequently the deputation reported as follows :—Wood had

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stated that his duty was to see that food supplies are maintained. There would, he said, be no interference if the Trade Unionists would continue to do the work. Tarbit had explained why the men had withdrawn their labour, and Wood replied that he had no knowledge of the importation of the outside labour (O.M.S.), and it had certainly made its appearance on the quay without his knowledge or authority, and would not allow, so long as he got the food to the people of Newcastle and District, anyone, in any way, to interfere with the habitual occupations of people who usually do this, so long as they will do it. Tarbit raised the question of unloading ships, part of which only was foodstuffs, and stated that his men would equally object to working with the Emergency Organisation (formerly O.M.S.) if these people unloaded the other parts of the cargo. Wood asked what our proposal was in such cases. We made the suggestion to him that the ships could either go to anchorage in the river with their non-food cargoes on board, waiting the end of the dispute for complete discharge, or return to their port of origin. It was further represented by us to him with the utmost emphasis that he should take steps to have the naval contingent, which had been berthed alongside the quay, in a most provocative manner, moved back to the usual naval anchorage at Jarrow, as it was impossible for us to agree that our men should be forced to work under the shadow of their guns. Wood stated that he had no control over the Admiralty in this matter, but appeared to indicate that a suggestion from him to the Commanders of the vessels might have the desired effect. He repudiated the idea that the anchorage taken up by the naval contingent had reference to the quay workers, but that these boats were kept in their present position to deal with possible riots or attacks upon power stations. He expressed himself as being obliged to us for the statement of our position, and thanked us for the valuable information we had given relating to quay work, &c., and stated he would like an opportunity of talking the matter over with his officers. He asked if we would adjourn the conversations, and meet him and General Kerr Montgomery on the morrow at 12.30. We agreed. Report received and agreed that the same deputation continue the conversations to-morrow with the whole of the Strike Committee in session at 12.30 to consider any proposals which might come from Wood and colleagues.

Minutes of Strike Committee, Thursday, May 6

(1) Flynn, White and Tarbit met Kingsley Wood, Kerr Montgomery, and Moon (Food Officer) in Edwards' room at 12.30, and subsequently reported as follows :—

Wood stated they agreed to take steps to see that no outside people were brought in. He suggested that so far as the quay is concerned the Trade Unions appoint an officer to work in conjunction with an officer appointed by him (Wood) to deal with any trouble which

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might arise and to supervise the work. Generally, they (Wood & Co.) agreed to the definition of foodstuffs as outlined by the T.U.C. and felt that no disagreement would arise on this head. We asked what would be the position regarding non-unionists and blacklegs, as our men would only acknowledge permits issued to the Trade Unionists by the Strike Committee. Wood replied, "they would welcome any suggestions which we can make inside the Government scheme, but any question of Trade Union labour loading and unloading vessels should be obviated by dual control. We suggested that this could only be met by him clearing off the quay altogether and leaving the men who usually did the work to carry on as usual. He replied that he could not abrogate his functions or act contrary to the instructions he had received. Montgomery stated that the full extent to which they would go, and they were anxious that this should operate, was that "all men now doing their ordinary work should continue to do so." Wood concurred, and stated " he would take any steps in conjunction with the Executive here to see that this is carried out." The general discussion then took place in reference to non-union labour, and Montgomery stated that they would go as far as to see that any chauffeur whose normal work is not to drive the lorries would be put off. Wood concurred, and in saying the position was reasonable, stated he would take steps to stop anyone not normally doing the work of transport. We replied that we would have to make a report to our Executive and would convey our decision later, and Wood requested that his proposals should be put fairly before the Executive. In promising to do this Flynn stated that he would not be able personally to recommend the form of dual control proposed. It was agreed that Montgomery should come back again at 4 p.m. to receive our reply.

(2) It was agreed after hearing the foregoing report that the representatives of the Executive inform Montgomery that :—

" Having heard this report and recognising that our men cannot, and will not, work in conjunction with O.M.S., we instruct that a reply be sent to the gentlemen named, that we cannot agree to our men working under any form of dual control."

(3) It was further agreed that we strongly recommend to the Trade Union Congress General Council that they shall empower us to withdraw all permits for the transport of food and everything else for which permits have been issued.

(4) Agreed that we now use the discretionary powers vested in us by the T.U.C. and withdraw *all* permits to-day.

The decision to withdraw all permits was forced upon the Committee by the local situation and re-inforced by the telegrams from headquarters. It was a momentous decision in that it immediately raised a number of other problems, but no other

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policy was possible in view of the abuse of permits that had taken place. Had there been previously carefully worked out plans on the Trade Union side as there had been on the employers' and Governmental side it would have been possible to start the general strike on the first day with a complete and immediate withdrawal of labour, and thereafter to issue permits under a system of strict controls. That, however, had not been the position ; and it is to be noticed that by their decision of Thursday the Strike Committee gained for the first time the complete control over transport which was vital to the success of any centralised conduct of a general strike. Throughout most of the two counties this decision was loyally accepted and operated. In place after place the miners aided the transport workers in peaceful picketing, and the aid they gave was of an extremely effective nature.

LATER DEVELOPMENTS IN THE GENERAL STRIKE

FOOD PROBLEMS : On Friday the success of the general strike appeared completely assured. It was clear to everyone that the O.M.S. organisation was unable to cope with the task imposed upon it. The attitude of the population was favourable to the strikers and unfavourable to the Government. There were no disturbances, the Trade Unionists maintained an almost perfect discipline. There was no change from the ordinary except for the quietness in the streets and the absence of traffic.

In the session of Friday evening the Joint Strike Committee were able to discuss the situation with Mr. C. P. Trevelyan, M.P., who had arrived from London as special emissary from the General Council, on a basis of the complete mastery of the difficulties that had so far confronted it. The situation as a whole was now well in hand.

On the same evening the Committee made the necessary arrangements to carry out the T.U.C. General Council's design of publishing the *British Worker* in Newcastle-on-Tyne. As will be seen later, this project was considerably interfered with by unforeseen obstacles, and the paper did not eventually appear until the Tuesday morning in its Newcastle edition.

Meantime, on Friday evening the new problems confronting the Committee began to assume an aspect of urgency. Our embargo

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on food transport had been generally effective, but particularly so in the case of the retail Co-operative Societies, whose highly organised staffs ceased work to a man. This meant that those private traders who were in a position to convey essential foods, either by owner drivers or by non-unionists, were placed in a position of superiority to the Co-operative Societies. On the other hand the picketing, we were informed, was least effective in the Gateshead and Newcastle area and most effective in the outlying district. Accordingly the Committee had an interview with the Newcastle Co-operative Society, and it was agreed to release their bread and milk for the period of the week-end, to the extent of fifteen bread vans and a larger proportionate number of milk carriers. This was done by special permit valid for two days only. A similar arrangement was reached with the Gateshead Society.

The previous problem of obtaining printing permits still remained with us. The dispatch sent off to the T.U.C. General Council on the Friday afternoon emphasised the necessity, as every telephonic conversation had emphasised it up till then, of having in the Newcastle district a paper which would give accurate information, up-to-date information, and local information, to meet the extremely virulent poison that was being poured out from the blackleg sheets. No matter how much our people might be warned against believing the wireless or the blackleg press, it was impossible to cope with the lies and rumours set going without an effective means of reply. This we were denied up till then by the absence of any permit from the Typographical Association, and the Committee were resolved even when it was against the most obvious requirements of the emergency not to go a single step beyond the Trade Union Congress and the Trade Union Executives' instructions or prohibitions. Where they had discretionary power the Committee were prepared to use it as determined by the local situation and the local needs ; where they had no discretionary power the Committee felt themselves bound to carry out the Trade Union Congress decisions to the letter, no matter how many misgivings they might have. The disciplined attitude of the Joint Strike Committee towards Eccleston Square and the Trade Union Executives was assumed from the beginning and never questioned at any moment.

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The other main group of problems that was soon to confront the Committee was occasioned by the changing attitude on the part of the Capitalist authorities. In a telephone conversation with the Intelligence Department of the Trade Union Congress on Friday evening, we stated that the next move of Sir Kingsley Wood, as far as could be judged, was likely to be an attempt to break down picketing by force. It was clear that O.M.S. had failed. The alternative was local negotiations, which Sir Kingsley Wood was not likely to undertake after the parliamentary incident to which we have referred earlier, or an attempt to use force and other provocative measures which, whatever the immediate effect, would in the long run furnish the necessary excuses for bringing in the Military forces and the Naval ratings. It would appear, however, that over and above Sir Kingsley Wood the decision to break down picketing by force came from some central authority. At the time we were only in a position to speak locally, and locally we had reached the conclusion that this was going to be Sir Kingsley Wood's attitude. As will be seen this forecast proved to be right, and the actions of the police culminated during the week-end in many baton charges and in the arrest of several prominent persons.

On the Saturday morning (May 8), there assembled in the Gateshead Town Hall a Conference of Councils of Action, Strike Committees &c., &c., from all parts of the counties of Northumberland and Durham, and also from other places further afield such as Carlisle, Middlesbrough and Workington. After the business of the Conference had been briefly introduced by the Chairman, Mr. James White, it was addressed at some length by Mr. Chas. Trevelyan, M.P., who gave them a message from the Trade Union Congress General Council. Mr. Flynn, the Secretary, then gave a report of the work done to date. This report, after discussion, was adopted and the action of the Joint Strike Committee confirmed and approved. On the other hand, it was made clear that the Strike Committee was subject to the decisions of the Trade Union Congress General Council together with the Trade Union Executives and was not subject in any way to the decisions of that particular Conference.

The main discussion centred round the question of the embargo

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on food supplies. It was pointed out that intensive picketing had effectively stopped all transport in certain mining areas, such as Annfield Plain, Houghton-le-Spring, Chopwell, &c., &c. At the same time the embargo on food transport had stopped all co-operative societies. The result was the fear of shortage in the villages. As against an instruction to the Strike Committee *re* food the Conference by a small majority—69 to 64—passed a resolution remitting the whole matter to the Strike Committee for them to decide. This accordingly became the main item on the agenda of the Strike Committee meeting held subsequent to the Conference.

In the evening (Saturday, May 8), the Joint Strike Committee discussed once more, and this time at great length, the question of releasing food transport for the Co-operative Societies. It should be clearly understood that there was not, so far as could be ascertained at that time or at any time during the strike, any shortage of essential foods in any village, but the feeling expressed at the Conference of Councils of Action was something that had to be reckoned with and met as far as possible. Alarmist fears of a food shortage were only less serious than an actual food shortage. On the other hand the Committee had its instructions from the Trade Union Congress General Council and from the Union executives. Between these instructions on the one hand and the local feeling on the other the Committee's business was to find a correct line of policy, and that line once found, to pursue it steadily but carefully.

Before proceeding to deal with the line adopted by the Committee it must be realised that one apparently obvious solution had been already ruled out, or if not ruled out left so far on one side as to make it very difficult to adopt—That was the provisioning of the strikers by means of the Co-operative movement. This policy, had it been possible to follow it to the full and from the beginning, would have been part of the general strategy of the general strike ; and the kernel of that strategy would have been *the struggle for food control*.

Why had this been ruled out ? It is important to ask this question even in the middle of a narrative and to have it answered, because it is not easy otherwise to understand the position of the Committee or the policy it followed. This policy, however obvious

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and expedient it might seem, could not be adopted at the beginning for several reasons, viz :—

(1) The Trade Unions had no permanent or even provisional arrangements with the Co-operative movement or any representative part of it.

(2) The C.W.S. directors had in the earlier spring issued a note refusing credits in advance, and by this act had most definitely been ranged, at any rate in public opinion, on the side of the Government and the Capitalists as against the coal miners and their possible allies, the other Trade Unions.

(3) The same absence of detailed preparation, to which we have already referred, had of course precluded any local arrangements being come to between the Co-operative Societies and local Trade Unionists.

So that, as a result of these things, the policy which from a strategical view point might seem the best one, was almost out of court at the time of the strike, and could only be brought into it by a laborious and painful process of discovering that every other solution contained more difficulties than this particular policy. The general strike, however, had run its course before the final stage of any such process could be reached.

These points, however, will serve to illuminate the discussions which took place on the Joint Strike Committee on the Saturday night, and on other nights both before and after. They are probably paralleled by similar discussions in every strike centre throughout the country. On the one hand there was the necessity of seeing that our own people were fed, and the immediate necessity of dispelling the alarmist rumours of shortage. There was equally the necessity of seeing that the ranks of the transport workers and others concerned in the production and distribution of food were not broken by any unwarranted or excessive supply of permits.

It was clear on the Sunday that the Co-operative Wholesale Society and possibly the Retail Societies had before them the very difficult choice of closing down many of their activities or of openly becoming suppliants for the aid of a strike breaking organisation. The dilemma was a difficult one, and the members of the Joint Strike Committee, all of them co-operators, had the

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utmost sympathy with the plight into which the Co-operative movement was thrust. It appeared possible that at any rate a partial solution, a day to day solution, or even an hourly solution, might be devised by means of a Sub-Committee. It was equally apparent that any general yielding on the question of removing the embargo on the food supplies was at the moment completely out of the question. Still less was it possible to accept the suggestion put forward very strongly by some of the Co-operators that supplies of coal should be released for transport. In fact it might be said that applications of this kind, that is for the transport of coal, served only to make the problems confronting the two bodies more difficult in that it tended to persuade the trade unionists that they could not rely upon the co-operators to exhibit a sympathetic understanding of the aims and purposes of the general strike into which the movement had been forced. Without a sympathetic understanding of that kind the best efforts to solve the dilemma in which the Co-operative movement found itself were likely to prove fruitless.

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THE MINERS' STRUGGLE CONTINUES

By HERBERT SMITH

WHEN we held our Miners' Federation Conference on Friday, May 14, two days after the General Strike had been declared off, the first thing that we did was to express our heartfelt thanks to our fellow-workers who had so nobly come out in their millions in support of the miners. It was a wonderful response to the call. In every part of England, Scotland and Wales, the organised workers showed themselves ready and eager to help our men. And unorganised workers too came with them. For it was not only the trade unionists who helped us but the whole working class, headed and led by the trade unionists. There has never been such a nation-wide demonstration in this country of the workers' solidarity and unstinted readiness to help one another. As one of the working class I feel proud of what my class could do. As a miners' representative I feel a tremendous debt of gratitude.

We did more than express our thanks on that last Federation Conference on May 14. We were meeting at a moment when it seemed that hundreds of thousands of the best fighters in our movement were going to be victimised, thrown on the scrap heap only for this cause that they helped their fellow workers. At the same time we were hearing every day of more and more arrests of active trade unionists for "crimes" invented by the Emergency Powers Act. So we there and then recorded our determination as a Federation to do what we could for these men, to get them out of prison or back into employment, by whatever means we could, to stand by them as they had stood by us. We sent out at once to the districts of the Federation to let us know of the cases (seventeen hundred and sixty in all, the Home Secretary stated when the Emergency Powers Act was being renewed), so that we might see what could be done. If any man's case has been overlooked, I hope he, or his wife, or his mates will not hesitate to write up and let us know the details. This is a matter in which we feel

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ourselves bound to do everything we possibly can, for the lads that were jailed for our sakes.

But if we thus recorded our thanks for all that was done for us up till the end of that second week of May, we as miners have still to go on with our struggle. In that struggle we hope that the other workers will still continue to help us. We hope that their magnificent effort of the first fortnight of May, that the tremendous display of solidarity then shown will, now that the general strike has been called off, be formed into other channels. I am sure that the spirit that was then displayed will go on expressing itself either by sympathetic action, of one kind or another, by help to our miners' wives and children, by one or another form of aid and support. I don't want to particularise, because each group of men will be able to help in a different manner. I simply want to make it clear that just as we looked to the other workers at the end of April, so now at the beginning of June we look to them to continue that help.

As workers we have all had a great object lesson : a lesson in solidarity. I am sure the spirit displayed during the nine days general strike and since amongst the rank and file has done more to build up our movement, to cement every stone of it together, than all the propaganda of the last ten years. Not that I am against chaps getting up on the soap-box. I do a bit of it myself, and if we had not had our people going round the country speaking in the last few years, we shouldn't have had this great event of May, 1926. But what I mean is that solidarity in action *teaches* the workers ten times more, nay, a hundred times more, than solidarity in words or good wishes.

Hammersmith bye-election showed that the lesson of solidarity had been learnt. I hope it will never be forgotten again. Whether it is at the ballot box, or at their daily work, in their household buying and selling, in the papers they read, in whatever activity, the workers must learn that lesson to stand together. That is the lesson for our movement.

And it must never be forgotten that Movements are bigger than Men. Think of what our Movement has shown itself capable of, not only nationally but internationally as well. Our appeal brought a wonderful response from all over the world. From the

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Russian workers alone we received a gift of two hundred and seventy-four thousand pounds. And I know—for it is not eighteen months ago that I was meeting those same Russian workers—that they send that money because they *understand* the meaning of solidarity. They know it means that if their fellow workers are attacked, no matter in what part of the world, they too are attacked. They know it because they have had ten years and more at that lesson. We began to learn it thoroughly this last year.

It is nine months ago since I wrote something that is just as true now.

> All these things have but one conclusion. That conclusion is that we have *got to fight*. Our back is up against the wall. We have no choice. On this the Federation Conference was absolutely and completely of one mind.
>
> Nevertheless, though we miners are united on this, it is worth while to point out for the benefit of the readers of THE LABOUR MONTHLY (amongst whom are included many colliers) what would be the effect of a retreat. A retreat would mean starvation wages now, *followed by yet another cut six or nine months hence.* And other workers will begin to feel the draught. A retreat would mean the partial break-up of the Miners' Federation, it would mean that the owners would be strong enough to compel the miners to cringe, to abandon all the forward policies of the past fifteen years, and for years to come to accept all reductions without a murmur. A retreat now might well prove a turning point not only for the miners but for the whole of British Trade Unionism. Fortunately there is no question of a retreat. I am not even arguing against it: for the simple reason that it has never been suggested. But I deal with it because I want our fellow Trade Unionists to realise that their lot is at stake along with ours; and that in helping the miners, they will be doing so not for sentimental reasons, but for their own dear sake as well. *

Now take what has happened in the last two years. In these twenty-four months the miners have been getting a wage that isn't high enough, as we all know. But they have been *keeping* it. Against all other arguments we can point out to all the politicians and busy-bodies (and I am one that thinks if a man has got a job to do in our Movement he ought to stick to it and not keep interfering in other people's jobs), that all these schemes would have lost millions of pounds to the miners and their wives and children.

* The quotation is from "The Strategy of the Miners' Struggle," by Herbert Smith, which appeared in THE LABOUR MONTHLY, August, 1925.

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Our Federation by its policy has maintained these wages rates, low as they are : and every miner's wife ought to be thankful to the Federation that she hasn't got less in her pocket every time she goes to the store.

What applies to wages applies even more to hours and agreements. I am not prepared at my age to recommend that men should go down the pit to work longer hours. If mineowners had approached the Sankey scheme in a proper spirit it should be a question of six hours we would be discussing now. Same with national agreements. We must stick to that. It is a basic principle. We ought to press towards the workers in every coalfield having similar wages for similar work. National Agreements takes us along that road.

That similar wage in every coalfield must begin by being a living wage. Nobody, not even our bitterest opponents, can pretend our present wage is a living wage. Yet if the industry were reorganised, if the load of wastefulness and extravagance were tumbled off its back, even if the meagre reorganisation of the Coal Commission were carried out, if the bye-products, earned profits, &c., were bound up with the rest of the industry, we could easily have coal sold at an economic price that would yield a living wage to the miners and yet be cheaper to the consumer than it is now.

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THE POLICE PERSECUTIONS

A Document of the General Strike

DURING the latter part of the General Strike and in the days that followed, many hundreds of the working class were laid by the heels. In case after case these men have gone to prison for performing their ordinary trade union duty of peaceful picketing—a duty which under the Emergency Powers Act had suddenly become extremely hazardous.

In other cases men were sent to gaol for doing nothing, literally nothing. They came upon a crowd. In the usual way, curiosity impelled them to " go over and see what is up." They find themselves suddenly caught in a baton charge. Arrest, trial and sentence followed.

In yet another case a man is visited in his own house by two policemen : he is drawn into conversation : he reminds the policemen that they too belong to the working class. He is at once arrested, and is given a savage sentence of imprisonment. A friend of his present at the colloquy (who might conceivably have proved an awkward witness if not implicated in the charge) is stated to have said, " I agree with him." *For this statement he is given a month's imprisonment.*

Usually the reports of these cases in the Fleet Street dailies have been so meagre that the enormity of the procedure, the class bias of the magistrates, are not made evident. Below we give from the *Blaydon Courier* of May 22 a complete report of a police prosecution. The case is not selected. Much worse instances could be found. But it is fairly typical.

Over all Great Britain things like this were happening during the month of May. For thousands of working-class homes these police prosecutions are something burned into their memory, as the Bloody Assizes of Judge Jeffreys burned into the peasantry of the West of England after the battle of Sedgemoor. And in the creation of a wide-spread resentment amongst the masses, the Government of Mr. Baldwin and the whole governing class may find the police pogroms and magisterial excesses will recoil on their own heads.

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At the Gateshead County Police Court on Thursday, Edward Wilson (40), a miner, of Glenburn Terrace, Rowlands Gill, was summoned for having contravened Regulation 21 of the Emergency Regulations by doing a certain act which was likely to cause disaffection among the civil population by distributing a document known as the "Northern Light."

Mr. Frank J. Lambert appeared to prosecute on behalf of the police and the defendant was represented by Mr. Swinburn G. Wilson, who pleaded not guilty.

Mr. Lambert, in his opening statement, said the defendant was a Labour leader and, he understood, was a member of the Communist League. Defendant had taken a very active part in the unfortunate strike which had fortunately come to an end.

The document in this case (the "Northern Light") he would hand up to the Bench. It was published two days after the Court cases last Thursday. What the prosecution said—and the Bench would see as the case went on—was that the paper was a deliberate chronicle of wicked falsehoods and such as was likely to cause dissatisfaction amongst the civil population; and there could be no question about the underlying motives of that document. It would be necessary to call attention to the various accounts or reports which appeared in the paper, the "Northern Light," and which was printed by, as far as the prosecution knew, the Council of Action. In that paper there was an account of what happened at Gateshead last Thursday.

The paper went on to say :—

> A band of 300 to 500 men and women (and not 90 or 100 as stated by the lying capitalist Press) marched to Gateshead from Spen and Highfield behind the Victoria Garesfield Miners' Lodge banner. They marched orderly into the town and settled themselves round about the police court to patiently await the result of the trial. This quiet gathering did not suit the police, and one officer in particular did his best to cause trouble. This swaggering Junker (who is being reported to the proper quarters) went about Swinburne Street the whole of the time, insulting and pushing people about, his sole object apparently being to create an excuse for a baton charge.

Mr. Lambert, proceeding, said the people were so hostile that the police had to send for reinforcements and to form their men up for a baton charge. There was this baton charge, and it was a serious baton charge. Men were knocked out and so forth and others were locked up. These men used serious threats to the police, while his (Mr. Lambert's) position, because he happened to be prosecuting in the case, was such that he had to close his office—which was a cowardly thing to force anyone to do—because he was simply carrying out his duties as a lawyer.

The baton charge took place and the crowd were smashed up.

The paper also contained :—

> Seeing what was brewing, and actually hearing some policemen say they wished to be given orders to charge the crowd, some of us did our best to keep order and succeeded after the decision of the

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Court had been given in persuading the demonstrators to leave for home. They had proceeded some distance along Askew Road, on their way home, when a body of policemen, led by a well-known inspector and sergeant at their head, bearing the outward resemblance of gentlemen, went behind the peaceable and innocent procession with their brutally trained and uniformed bullies and belaboured unarmed people unmercifully. The sergeant in his usual heroic style hung back when the attack commenced.

The polluted rags like the *North Mail* and the *Northern Echo* print the foul lie that the demonstrators had attacked the police, but the hollowness of this frail excuse is exposed by the fact that not one policeman was injured, but a dozen or so of our men with wounds bore testimony to the brutality of the police. The powers that be are mistaken if they think tactics of this kind will crush our movement. We must get on with the fight and make our organisation better for the next time.

The statement that has appeared in the dirty scab Press that some of our boys were armed with pick-shafts is a deliberate lie and a vile slander on law-abiding citizens, many of whom during the years 1914 to 1918 were on active service and who were told, " A grateful country shall never forget you."

Mr. Lambert described the statements made as deliberate and wicked falsehoods.

The paper also went on to state—and this was the part he desired to call the attention of the Bench to :—

After Comrade Joice had been arrested he was kicked by the police. Mat. Joice saw four years on active service, but never in his experience has he seen such fiendishness as shown by these guardians of law and order.

Anthony Hession had been arrested, he was brutally belaboured by the police, and his heartrending shrieks could be heard inside the building. One of our comrades actually saw this brutal assault and is prepared to give his testimony on oath.

If the authorities think that such brutal attacks can smash our movement and crush our spirits they are mistaken, it only helps to strengthen our determination to carry the workers' cause to victory.

These men had got to understand, said Mr. Lambert—and he thought they were beginning to understand—as Sir Alfred rightly said last week, that no one would be allowed to over-ride the laws of this land ; and if these men insisted in this course of action, so would the authorities persist in their course of action, and they intended to meet force with force.

The paper went on :—

A Message from Jail

An interview with the lads in prison took place for fifteen minutes after they were sentenced and the message was, " Go on with the fight, let not the prisons daunt you." That is their spirit. Let it be yours.

The Bench would remember that Messrs. Metcalf had not obtained a permit from the Council of Action to take food into Chopwell, and an item in the paper showed that they were still trying

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to carry out this thing and to show that the Council of Action was the ruling authority of Chopwell. About the only true thing in the paper was "That every edition of the 'Northern Light' is eagerly awaited by the police."

He wanted to read, for the benefit of the Court, what they thought about the police force, and it was this :—

> The lowest aim in life is to be a policeman. When a policeman dies he goes so low he has to climb up a ladder to get into hell, and even then he is not a welcome guest. (Laughter.)

Sir Alfred : It is rather funny, that.

Mr. Lambert said they knew that if this case was proved there was a place at Durham where these men and others would be welcomed, and perhaps shown the folly of having anything whatever to do with the distribution of the paper, or being associated in any way with this terrifying and despicable organisation known as the Council of Action which, he thought, was now dying a quick death.

It said in the report that these men were not armed, but as a matter of fact they were armed. One had a pick-shaft, with which he struck an officer over the arm. It was a very serious allegation to make against the police force which, they must admit, had done their work in a most admirable way. They had not to seek the assistance of the military, and he thought they were to be complimented in every possible way.

Sir Alfred M. Palmer : I did compliment them last week.

Mr. Lambert said the defendant was seen at Rowlands Gill on May 15, about 8.15 p.m., carrying a batch of these papers. He went up to a woman and handed a copy of the paper to her. The officer asked him what he had in his possession and he said they were "Northern Lights."

Mr. Lambert said he thought the paper was printed by the Council of Action, and paper and material were provided by the local authority at Blaydon because the chairman, Bolton, who was in prison, happened to be chairman at that time, and he took unto himself the right to commandeer the office and their stationery and typewriter, as the Bench would no doubt have seen in the papers; it was known now as "The Blaydon Scandal."

Mr. Lambert said he hoped that that would be dealt with by the "powers that be." When the defendant was asked where he got the papers from he said he had been to Sedgefield seeing his son. He had just got back and found seventy-eight copies waiting for him. He did not know where they came from. A lad generally brought them, and he thought he came from Chopwell. Asked if he gave them away he replied that he was selling them for one penny.

Mr. Lambert pointed out to the Bench that, notwithstanding the appeal of the Prime Minister that good fellowship and so forth should prevail, and notwithstanding the leniency which the magistrates dealt out last week, and of which the Council of Action were taking no heed whatever, or the warning given by the

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chairman of the Bench, they were continuing in their course of action.

They might not be using violence, but they were resorting to this method of creating dissatisfaction amongst the civil population, and he wanted the Bench to carry their minds back to the time when the strike was on.

The Council of Action was still carrying on their terrifying way. The paper was still being circulated in the districts, but they could not find out where it was being printed, therefore they could not raid the place and blot it out altogether in the same way as they hoped to be able to blot out this so-called Council of Action.

He appealed to the Court, for the safety of the community, for the safety of the people in the neighbourhood of Chopwell, Blaydon, Ryton and Spen, as there was no doubt about it that they were terrified to death by the members and those who were at present carrying out, and still maintaining, this Council of Action.

They were a menace to the neighbourhood and would have to be dealt with, and now that they had got them in their hands he was going to ask the Court to stamp them out.

The feeling was there, and they were making the lives of the people who had nothing to do with the Council of Action a perfect hell on earth in the district. He asked the Bench to take a very serious view, and if they found the case proved to send the defendant to prison.

Sergt. Curry gave evidence and said the defendant was a member of the Communist League.

Mr. Wilson said his client was not a member of the Communist League.

Inspector Gibson, of the Gateshead Borough Police Force, described the incidents which took place after the hearing of the case against Messrs. Bolton and Lawther, and said the police tried to avoid trouble. The police did not organise a baton charge. One of the constables received a blow on the right arm from a pick-shaft produced. The assailant was going to hit another officer when the police had to draw their batons to defend themselves. The pick-shaft was taken from a man named Purvis. Hession was not ill-treated, as had been alleged.

Mr. Wilson, for the defence, said the defendant was only distributing the paper as others were doing at the time, when men were not calm and things were not normal and did not know the consequences or the seriousness of their act. When checked he immediately gave the papers to the police. It was not true that the defendant was a member of the Communist League, or that he had been to Communist meetings.

Sir Alfred M. Palmer: Is he a Bolshevist?

Mr. Wilson: No, sir.

Sir Alfred: What is he—a Liberal, like myself?

Mr. Wilson said his client belonged to the Labour Party.

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Mr. Wilson pointed out that his client was in no way identified with the contents of the publication. He was merely the scapegoat. That was what it amounted to. He thought he was acting in a lawful way. The defendant had not been in a police court before and bore an unblemished character.

The Bench retired, and on returning into Court, the chairman said: "Edward Wilson, by the unanimous verdict of the Bench you have been convicted of the offence with which you are charged. The only difference is as to the punishment which you should be given. We are all agreed that you must go to jail without the option of a fine. The only difference is as to the period. We cannot have Chopwell and the neighbourhood governed by a set of men like you. The inhabitants of Chopwell have to live under the laws passed by Parliament and approved of by the King. They are not to be governed by a set of laws which you and your colleagues and hooligans of your description choose to draw up; and they are the laws of the land.

"The manner in which Chopwell has been governed for some time past now is a scandal, and this Bench is determined, if it comes to us, that that state of affairs shall be put an end to.

"Why you and those who are associated with you don't go off to Russia I don't know. I am sure the Government and I, personally, would subscribe willingly to get rid of the whole lot of you and let you go and live in that country where everything is so peaceful and happy. You are making a mistake living in this country. You had far better get away, all of you. We don't want you, or anybody else like you. You are just a danger to the community, and the sooner you make up your minds to reform, or get away, the better for all concerned."

The accused was *sentenced to prison* for three months, with hard labour, the Chairman adding that if he had had his own way he would have sent him to prison for three months and fined him £100.

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